

REMARKS

This is a full and timely response to the Office Action mailed December 16, 2003 (Paper No. 5). Claims 1-3, 5-15, 17-23, 25, and 27-29 are now pending in the application, with Claims 1, 13, and 23 being the independent claims. Claims 1, 13, and 23 have been amended, and Claims 4, 16, 24, and 26 have been canceled herein. No new matter is believed to have been added.

Before proceeding to the merits of the Office Action, Applicants wish to thank Examiner Swiatek for his indication that Claims 4, 6, 16, 18, and 26 are directed to patentable subject matter.

REJECTIONS UNDER 35 USC §§ 102 and 103

Claims 1-3, 5, 9-15, 17, 21-23, 25, 27, and 29 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as allegedly being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 4,458,554 (Hrastar), and Claims 7, 8, 19, 20, and 28 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 as allegedly being unpatentable over Hrastar. In response, and while not conceding the propriety of these rejections, Applicants have amended independent Claims 1, 13, and 23 to include the features recited in Claims 4, 16, and 26, respectively, which were indicated as being directed to allowable subject matter. As such, these rejections are mooted.

In view of the foregoing, Applicants respectfully solicit withdrawal of the above-noted rejections under §§ 102 and 103.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above, independent Claims 1, 13, and 23 are patentable over the citations of record. The dependent claims are also submitted to be patentable for the reasons given above with respect to the independent claims and because they recite features which are patentable in their own right. Individual consideration of the dependent claims is respectfully solicited.

The other art of record is also not understood to disclose or suggest the inventive concept of the present invention as defined by the claims.

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Reply to Office Action of December 16, 2003

No. 0524 P. 9

Applicants submit that the present application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejections set forth in the above-noted Office Action, and an early Notice of Allowance are requested.

If for some reason Applicants have not requested a sufficient extension and/or have not paid a sufficient fee for this response and/or for the extension necessary to prevent abandonment on this application, please consider this as a request for an extension for the required time period and/or authorization to charge Deposit Account No. 50-2091 for any fee which may be due.

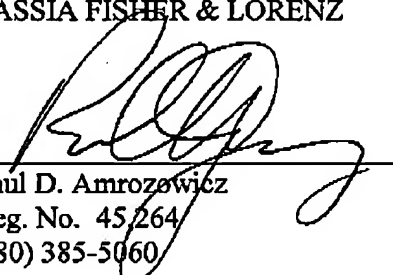
Moreover, if the Examiner has any comments or suggestions that could place this application in even better form, the Examiner is requested to telephone the undersigned attorney at the below-listed number.

Respectfully submitted,

INGRASSIA FISHER & LORENZ

Dated: March 16, 2004

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